CHAPTER 10

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT ACCESS TO OWI

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This chapter examines difficulties faced by nontraditional students when negotiating online learning in general and OWCs as a particular example of their access challenges. It begins with an identification of populations considered nontraditional and underserved in the realm of online, as opposed to onsite, education. It then examines many of the issues that stand in the way of success for members of these groups as they attempt online learning and OWI particularly. Specific recommendations for OWI are included in the conclusion.

Keywords: African-American, incarcerated, military, older adults, prisons, remotely rural, social class, urban, working class

The CCCC OWI Committee's OWI principles began with what the committee has argued is the overarching principle for effective OWI. OWI Principle 1 reads: "Online writing instruction should be universally inclusive and accessible" (2013, p. 7). This recommendation should be considered at every step of WPA and OWI course planning and implementation processes, as indicated in Chapters 1 and 8.

Access for OWI is not universal today and, even in cases where OWCs are more or less accessible to students, there are factors that affect students' abilities to negotiate them. This lack of inclusiveness tends to be acutely experienced by nontraditional students. This chapter examines several student cohorts generally considered nontraditional and underserved—in that they are not the typical, age 24 and younger, residential students—and it examines the issues they face when negotiating online learning generally and an OWC particularly.

In July, 1995, the National Telecommunications & Information Administration (a division of the Department of Commerce) began a series of reports about what they called the "Have-Nots" with respect to technology access in America. A later report in that series introduced the term "digital divide" (US Department of Commerce, 1998). The term refers to the differences in digital tools and

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Internet access among various groups in American society. These reports examined racial, economic, geographic, and educational cohorts and considered their access to technology with respect to each other and to their own earlier status as presented in the previous reports (US Department of Commerce, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2004). The reports noted that young, affluent, white, educated, and especially urban and suburban students were more likely to have access to Internet technology than older, black, Hispanic, Asian, and rural students. Carolyn Haythornthwaite (2007) also found young, urban, suburban, Asian and white users with higher education and income levels to be more likely to be online than black, Hispanic, rural, low-education, or low-income students.

OWI would seem to be a particularly promising venue for serving some difficult-to-reach audiences. Students located so far away from a college center that commuting is impossible would appear to be a perfect fit for a fully online class. Active-duty military and their families often have schedules and sudden deployments that make an onsite writing course impossible. Prison inmates also seem to be a promising audience for OWCs because of the cost and difficulties of setting up onsite programs within the prison itself. Yet, for a variety of reasons, these and other groups like them tend to be underserved by online college and university writing programs.

This chapter first considers where students can access computers, digital technologies, and the Internet generally. Then, it examines the digital divide issue as faced by several nontraditional student groups as they attempt to negotiate OWCs. It concentrates on the following groups:

- Working-class students
- Older adult students
- Remotely rural students
- Urban students
- Military learners: Veteran and active-duty students
- Incarcerated students

While some of the issues faced by students in any one of the above groups tend to be common for all, a few are unique to one cohort. As such, this chapter examines each of the groups separately.

ACCESS AND THE PLIGHT OF THE UNDERSERVED

Access to computers, digital technologies, and the Internet for OWI normally is achieved through one or more of three sources: the home, school, or one's workplace. If none of those sources is available, students often are left to use the local public library as their only resort for finding the tools necessary for access

to OWCs.

The first source of computer use—the home—is one that many WPAs and OWI teachers take for granted. Family income is a factor in computer ownership; the US Department of Commerce found that in 2003 just under 50% of the families in the $25,000 to $35,000 income range were Internet users as opposed to nearly 83 percent of those earning $75,000 and above. For very low-income people (under $15,000 a year), just over 31% had access to the Internet at home (Lamb, 2005). For the more desirable high-speed broadband use that is almost a necessity with LMS software, the numbers are 13.4% for the lower income group versus 45.4% for the over $75,000 group (US Department of Commerce, 2004).

In recent years, the situation has not changed significantly. In 2013, children from families with incomes over $75,000 were projected to be twice as likely to have computer access in the home as very low-income families. The numbers for Internet access are even more striking. Ninety three percent of upper-income families were projected to have Internet access versus only 29% for very low-income families. For half of the low and very low-income families, then, access to the Internet typically can only be had at school, the public library, or work (Lamb, 2005).

But even the ability to access the Internet at home is not necessarily sufficient for access to online courses. Of the 50% of people earning under $35,000 a year who do have computer access in the home, many cannot afford to purchase the newer computers needed to remain compatible with current technology and learning strategies (Haythornthwaite, 2007). As educational institutions update their technology, many of the students in online classes are left behind. For example, students with computers without speakers are unable to hear lectures and other audio tools such as Vokis, the small avatars that show on screen and lip-sync messages recorded by the professor. Such students are not able to access any audio-based or audio/video-based asynchronous or synchronous OWI (Elliot, Haggerty, Foster, & Spak, 2008), as outlined in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. For all practical purposes, then, many students with computers and Internet access at home still lack the ability to fully use the Internet or their digital technologies for writing class purposes.

A second source for computer technology that students may access is in the school environment. For many students, their first exposure to computers comes in the classroom. Let us begin with an examination of elementary and secondary schools. A Department of Education study (2010) completed in 2009 found that 97% of teachers had one or more computers located in their classroom every day. Of those, Internet access was available for 93%. This high percentage would suggest that most young students do, indeed, have at least limited access

to computers and the Internet as a part of their lower school education process. A limiting factor might be the student-to-computer ratio. The same report identified that ratio as 5.3 students per computer. This ratio indicates that while there is availability, there must be some sharing if all students are to have access. That sharing decreases the likelihood that on any given day all students who need computer and Internet access will have it.

But computers are only helpful if they actually are used. In the same Department of Education study (2010), teachers reported that they or their students used computers in the classroom during instructional time "often" (40%) or "sometimes" (29%). That leaves 31% of students with little access for whatever reasons. In addition to the computers actually located in the classroom, some teachers reported that they or their students used computers in other locations in the school during instructional time "often" (29%) or "sometimes" (43%). Therefore, in the elementary and secondary school environments, most students appear to have computers and the Internet in their classroom environment. Access to the machines, however, is limited by the frequency of teacher use and the ratio of students to computers. And access to the technology is only part of the equation. To have full access to online work, students need to have a degree of experience with and preparation in the use of such tools.

The numbers cited above for current student usage of computers in school seem hopeful for OWI. However, these students are growing up with greater access to digital technologies than currently underserved populations of nontraditional students in postsecondary OWCs. The college situation and (hopefully) access to common technologies of today's average fifth or tenth graders will differ from a contemporary 34-year old worker who returns to college to get a degree that may help her to keep a job, become promoted, or find a new position in a poor economy. To the end of using computers for higher education and OWI, it is helpful to understand that students with less preparation for using computers educationally may have different access challenges once they begin attending college.[1] In some hybrid settings and in most fully online settings, students will need to complete much of their online writing work somewhere other than the actual classroom. Asynchronous courses typically require students to do most or all of their writing on their own. Lack of frequent opportunities to use the computer educationally in postsecondary work, in addition to the potential lack of a home computer—or, at least, an up-to-date computer—can hamper students significantly in feeling comfortable with the levels of work they need to address online for a writing course. To this end, OWI Principle 10 was written to promote adequate preparation for students who take OWI and to prepare them for its unique technological and pedagogical components, thereby increasing students' opportunities to succeed and thrive in the digital setting

(pp. 21-22). Even if they have computer access at home, hybrid and fully online writing students will need to seek outside access and assistance.

Finally, using the computer at work, of course, depends entirely on whether one's job calls for computer-based writing. For the most part, service-industry jobs require little-to-no composition on the computer, leaning instead on completing forms and addressing numbers. Positions where written reports and other such communications tend to be in the industries that pay a higher wage.

What happens if someone has no computer access at home, school, or work? Denise Narcisse (2010) reported that nearly 19 million of the US national poor rely on public library computers as their sole source for online work (2010). But public library access, even when available, generally is limited. Many libraries limit screen time, often to 30 minutes particularly when there is a line of potential users. Postsecondary school libraries and computer labs also have time and other use limits; however, the nontraditional student who takes an OWC often does so for geographical and time reasons, which in and of themselves limit students' abilities to use their school's libraries and labs. These time limitations alone create an insufficient scenario for any serious work in an OWC, but they are especially problematic in the writing class where prewriting assignments and drafts must be written, submitted, and revised in response to professors' comments. And they are particularly problematic when students have to rely on access to these technologies to synchronously participate in a class. Some libraries censor Internet sites that might be considered unacceptable for public viewing (Narcisse, 2010), which can limit certain types of research. In addition, most libraries impose printing restrictions or charge for hardcopy printing. Many students still prefer to revise on printed copy, which is a recommended strategy for students with a variety of reading and learning styles (Hewett, 2015a). When printing is banned for any reason, these students are disadvantaged. For students dependent on a library for their computer access, although some access exists, it is limited and may contribute to student frustration, attrition, and failure.

These situations have long-term effects. Samantha Blackmon (2003) found that some underserved students developed attitude issues, thinking there was some kind of a conspiracy that keeps them marginalized by denying them full access to technology. In addition to feeling disadvantaged because of their socioeconomic status, they had little or no educational interaction with the technology that would be critical to success in OWCs. Certainly, with lots of time, effort, and practice, once they are able to gain full access to digital technologies (e.g., through work or college computers), low-end users and late adopters might be able to catch up with other, more privileged students regarding experience and educational uses of the technologies. Nonetheless, Haythornthwaite (2007) found that even if late adopters do catch up, the effort to do so causes unequal

participation because these students continue to lag behind at the introduction of each new innovation. This difficulty is likely to be the case for working-class students and for less educated and rural people as well.

WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS

Working-class students, for the purposes of this chapter, are defined as those with lower than middle-level incomes, working primarily in service industries, receiving hourly wages, having potentially floating hours, and/or those who work more than one job to stay afloat. Other scenarios that keep these students from economic fluidity or that have not required consistent uses of writing in their work may apply. For these students, some experts have suggested that an OWC—particularly a fully online OWC—may not be their best choice for college writing courses.

Andrew Cavanaugh[2] is Director of Writing for the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), the largest public university in the country, with over 92,000 students worldwide. UMUC also is one of the largest providers of online education in the world with students in 50 states and 22 countries; it has long had a relationship with military organizations. According to Cavenaugh, students who lack a solid background in Internet and computer use have a special need for feedback from the professor in order to be successful. The asynchronous online environment used in many OWI programs makes immediate or regular individualized response to students more difficult than in an onsite or hybrid setting. Often, there are no set office hours during which a distance-based student can meet with the professor through synchronous chat or over a voice medium. End-of-class discussions do not occur in such settings, although hybrid courses make meeting onsite with teachers possible in some configurations (see Chapter 3). In essence, students who may need the most help with technological *and* educational issues are taking a class in the modality and medium least conducive to receiving the needed help (A. Cavanaugh, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Mark Parker, also from UMUC, noted that working-class students largely are unfamiliar with student life in general, right down to simple details such as the definition of plagiarism (M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012). They may never have been on a college campus, are not as involved with the campus activities, and often have families who need their attention when they are not working or taking college courses (Hewett, 2015a). Added to such pressures, the geographic separation from the professor caused by the online environment makes it more difficult for these students to even be aware of the things they do not know about negotiating college. To alleviate this kind of difficulty, Parker recommended that such students should take a "How

to be a College Student" type of course (M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Additionally, among other challenges for working-class students, financial viability remains an issue as it connects closely to their success. Allison Butler, also of UMUC, noted that students often are surprised at how difficult college classes are after coming out of high school or working for years, and it takes a while to realize that they are in trouble. Often, they withdraw late from a course and, as a result, find that they owe money to the financial aid program (A. Butler, personal communication, December 7, 2012). As difficult as deciding to return to school may have been to make, events such as failure, fear of failure, or a need to repay a grant because of failure easily can kill a student's desire to continue in school and obtain a college degree.

Providing Accessible OWI for Working-Class Students

The main issues facing working-class students regard Internet access, having current and advanced digital technology, and having sufficient experience to perform at a level where the technology does not become a large part of the learning required for a class. One of the benefits of teaching writing online is the ability to interact with students multiple times a day, seven days a week—provided the students also connect with the teacher and the teacher is willing to make such frequent connections. In my own classes, I receive drafts of planning assignments or sections of large reports often two and occasionally three times a day. A student lacking the access or ability for this frequency of communication with the professor is marginalized from the beginning. In order to participate fully in OWCs, students need to have access to a computer with an Internet connection, the software necessary to open downloaded files, and the expertise to accomplish the necessary tasks of using the LMS and the required software. With these capabilities, they can devote their efforts to the subject matter and not the technology. Without them, educational time is wasted by the technological learning curve, and students become frustrated.

When students work fully online from a geographic distance, the issue of access to the Internet is beyond the control of the professor, the course developer, or the institution itself. UMUC, for example, does not seek to attract students without Internet access for their online courses, offering instead some onsite courses (A. Cavanaugh, personal communication, December 7, 2012). They believe any change in Internet accessibility as a basic requisite for the course will have to be initiated by the government; at the time that students sign up for the course, they should have the necessary connection to do the work. This is an issue of basic access that seems to be particular to students who take fully online

courses (as opposed to hybrid courses), where they choose not to (or cannot) use the institution's computer labs and library offerings. This issue is different from access problems discussed in Chapter 8 because fully online students who choose to take a distance-based course would seem to be acknowledging that they can provide their own initial Internet connection to the course if geographically unable to make use of the institution's affordances.

For those who do have Internet access but at a reduced level (e.g., bandwidth limitations or outdated or missing software), other problems arise. Lower bandwidth means that every download takes longer and some files cannot be transferred. Students with limited bandwidth tend to have more challenges when downloading images and audio/video files. Additionally, when students lack a particular piece of software needed to view the downloaded file (e.g., PowerPoint), they also have access issues to the course. Recall that these additional files sometimes are necessary for learning style accessibility per Chapters 1 and 8 even while their use can create access problems for students with particular disabilities. These tend to be problems of socioeconomic access, to which OWI Principle 1 also speaks (pp. 7-11). Per the access guidance suggested in Chapters 1 and 8, OWI teachers can alleviate some of this problem by careful consideration of materials that students genuinely need to download, read, and use for the course.

There are ways to accommodate these students to some degree. In OWCs at my institution (Lee College in Baytown, Texas), for example, module lessons are built in PowerPoint. Upon discovering that many students lacked the Microsoft Office Suite for their home computers, the writing faculty began the practice of routinely converting PowerPoint files to PDF files that open easily in the LMS window. This accommodation accomplishes two things. First, no downloading of files is needed, and all parts of the course stay on the institution's server. Students with reduced bandwidth do not have to wait a long time. Second, students have access to the lesson whether or not they have the software of origination on their computers. By making such simple changes and avoiding the use of more "exotic" bells and whistles such as audio files and Vokis, educators can guarantee that students are not missing integral parts of a class because they lack the technology necessary to access the course material. Relatively speaking, such low band-width documents also tend to be accessible to the users of assistive and adaptive technologies.

Even moderate accommodations of this type are not without drawbacks, however. Once converted to PDF files, slideware files lose the ability to carry voice, external links, and information entry in segments (e.g., line-by-line text entry and pop-up arrows). Not only are some of the flashy attention-grabbers gone, but the pedagogy of the presentation itself is weakened by the necessity of

revealing an entire screen's material at once instead of allowing the presentation of a line-by-line explanation or argument.

Accommodating the low-end user also works against some of the key benefits associated with online learning such as interactivity with peers, real-time exchanges, and sophisticated training presentations (Haythornthwaite, 2007). Group discussions through synchronous text-based chats are difficult to follow when a narrow bandwidth shows the student a conversation ten lines behind where it is in real time (and where it is seen by classmates). Any entries posted will appear as non-sequiturs because they refer to sections of the discussion that took place a minute or more before the comment appears on the screen. Teachers may want their students to develop the ability to communicate in real time, but all too often, the technology available to students does not permit that, and real-time communication requires thoughtful decisions about when to use the synchronous and asynchronous modalities. Unfortunately, as those educators advance in technology uses, the lower-income students who lack that technology fall further behind. Every upgrade in equipment, requirements, or technology made at the college end is an added barrier to economically disadvantaged students (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

Finally, there is the issue of limited experience. In every aspect of college life, working-class students begin with far less experience than their managerial-professional class colleagues (Gos, 1996), and the types of experiences they may have (e.g., skills and drills exercises versus lengthy writing opportunities), do not prepare them for the kinds of writing and communicating online (Kynard, 2007) that contemporary rhetoric and composition courses attempt to provide through OWI. The fact that students struggle when facing an OWC is to be expected given the common access issues and potentially insufficient lower school training discussed above.

A problem is created when a working-class student without the ability and experience to operate the technology at a basic level matriculates into an OWC. Either the student is marginalized from the beginning, or the professor must devote learning time to technology education. OWI Principle 2 stated, "An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies" (p. 11) It is important to understand that this guideline was written (1) to keep the focus on writing over technology in a writing-based course and (2) to free teachers from the belief that their job is to teach new technologies in lieu of writing, as discussed in Chapter 1. Students should receive technology *and* writing-focused training regarding using that technology, however. OWI Principle 10 stated, "Students should be prepared by the institution and their teachers for the unique technological and pedagogical components of OWI" (p. 21). What

this means is that even underprepared and previously underserved students with limited economic resources should be given appropriate orientation to OWI and the LMS used in such courses.

For both hybrid and fully online students, such preparation might include an institutionally developed video that demonstrates the affordances of and how to use the LMS as well as that details some of the responsibilities of an online teacher and successful online student. Courses that provide basic computer training and LMS orientation are commonly available from colleges that offer online programs. In many cases, the course will be available both onsite and online. For online orientation courses, students must have enough ability to access an online training package before they can begin learning how to negotiate an online class, which can become the first problem that some students find in their attempts to take an online course. Another option used by many institutions is to require an onsite, initial class session where students meet with the professor to learn about the course and about how to negotiate the LMS. While this type of orientation can be helpful for those who can attend, some of the groups discussed in this chapter—particularly the remotely rural, the deployed military, and prisoners—would find these sessions onerous or impossible to attend.

From the pedagogical perspective, OWI teachers should include some orientation exercises that acquaint students with the basics of the LMS features they will use in support of the course, what writing online means, what successful discussion posts look like (see Chapter 4), as well as how to find and use the OWL (see Chapter 5). In addition to such orientating exercises, there are things of a "first-aid" nature that can be implemented to help students when they reach an obstacle or to assist in preparing themselves for the experience of an OWC. In a discussion about writing centers, Muriel Harris and Michael Pemberton (1995) described student needs for success in accessing and using online writing labs. Each of the items they identify also would help working-class students negotiate OWCs. They list the following student needs that remain important to address:

- Easy access to computer labs
- Training or short courses
- College-provided student computer accounts
- A computer center aggressive in assisting students to become computer literate

To this end, while fully online students may not have access to the campus computer labs, institutions should minimally provide training, online student accounts for accessing the OWL, libraries, and counseling resources (as indicated in OWI Principle 13), and 24/7 computing assistance to enable online students to be independent and efficient in their OWCs.

For a less abrupt transition to OWCs, working-class students might consider taking hybrid classes first. Cavanaugh indicated that some students like this option because they still receive the face-to-face contact with which they are comfortable. Parker, however, noted that any abrupt jumps between communication and learning styles in the two environments of onsite and online meetings may make the hybrid option less attractive (A. Cavanaugh & M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012). I see both things happening in my hybrid courses. In a first-year-level technical writing course that I teach as a hybrid, we meet strictly in the classroom for the first four weeks, an option discussed in Chapter 3. We then meet in the classroom about once a week for the next five or six weeks and do the remainder of the work online. Around the tenth week, I give students the option of finishing the course exclusively online or continuing to meet once a week. The course meets at night and virtually all of the students come to class after a full-days' work in the local oil refineries and chemical plants. One would think they would be vehement about finishing the semester online, but that has never been the case. The vote is always close and on one occasion, they voted to continue the onsite sessions throughout the remainder of the semester. This experience reminds educators of students' differing learning styles and preferences as well as the needs that some students have for familiar interaction (i.e., face-to-face) with instructors.

As faculty, we have little control over student accessibility in terms of their socioeconomic means. However, we should take into consideration and make accommodations for those with reduced computing and Internet capabilities. While faculty cannot provide students with initial Internet access, we can address their limited accessibilities with reasonable accommodations. For students with limited accessibility, software, and experience, WPAs and OWI course designers should avoid requiring downloads of lengthy files, images, and sound and video files when possible. Providing these on the LMS sometimes addresses this problem. Such accommodations can make it easier for students to access the course.

OLDER ADULT STUDENTS

While having a more general meaning today, the term "nontraditional student" was first used as a reference to students over the age of 24 years. This section addresses access needs of students who fall into the above 24-years range and sometimes are much older. These adult learners now account for nearly 40% of the student body at US colleges and universities (American Council on Education, 2013). A factor that separates some members of this group from others is whether or not they are in the work force.

A Department of Commerce (2004) study found that employed adults had a much greater likelihood of having computer technology and Internet access than those who were unemployed. Table 10.1 presents statistics for persons not having access to Internet use:

Table 10.1. Percent lacking Internet access (by age cohort)

Age	In Labor Force	Not in Labor Force
25-49	28.3	50.3
50+	35.6	72.4

Source: (US Department of Commerce, 2004)

In 2011, there remained such a disparity: "People with low incomes, disabilities, seniors, minorities, the less-educated, non-family households, and the non-employed tend to lag behind other groups in home broadband use" (Fact Sheet, 2011).

A lack of Internet access generally translates to a lack of Internet skills. Even when contemporary students are using mobile devices to access the Internet, this access, as explained in Chapter 16, is often different. When access is not there, the basic skills of using the Internet are not developed. If at some later date the adult learner gains access, he begins at a lower skill level than his colleagues. As a result, like the working-class students discussed above, those without access prior to enrolling in college courses may lag behind their classmates long after they have gained full Internet access. As time goes on and new technologies are introduced, those students tend to remain behind (Haythornthwaite, 2007). Students who are trying to do well in an OWC will face serious difficulties if the bulk of study time is spent negotiating the technology.

While employment is a great divider in terms of Internet access and experience, there are difficulties beyond access that seem to be ubiquitous across the older student cohort. One of those, for students who are in middle age, is sensory decline. Aging students often face deteriorating visual and auditory sensitivity as well as the ability to make fine motor movements (Morgan & Morgan, 2007). Some cognitive shifts in memory and determining priorities also may occur. Such decline may result in slower typing and computing, as well as a possible need for reminders about how to access particular parts of the LMS, for example. Building redundancy into the course (per Chapter 4 & 8's recommendations) becomes especially important with these kinds of concerns.

Another issue regarding an older student cohort—outside of technology—is that OWI teachers may need to address the affect connected with the lives students have led prior to coming to our classes. While writing instructors tend to

assume that copious life experience is a positive thing for a student in a writing course, it is not always the case that such life experiences have been positive for the students. It is true that traditionally aged students are younger with limited life experience beyond the family to bring to the writing course and that adult learners have been out in the world, in work, in society, and bring with them a richness of experience. Yet, some of that experience can be rather unpleasant, even detrimental to their lives, leading them to see themselves negatively in ways that affect their self-image as student writers. Kristen Welch of Southern Christian University, a small university in central Oklahoma, talked about a few of her older students:

> Some are just out of prison, others have small kids at home, others work full time, some are elderly or disabled. One was a recovering alcoholic. One main challenge is to conquer the negative self-talk that a life of very real failures has brought. One woman wrote her essay about her kids being taken by CPS, for example. (K. Welch, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

While not particular to OWI but an issue that certainly affects students who take hybrid and fully online courses, another effect of being a student over the age of 24 is a time gap between formal writing course experiences. As a result of being years away from their most recent formal English class, many older students find themselves playing catch-up, not only in the areas of critical thinking and idea development, but even in the areas of grammar and syntax. Welch also reported:

> Our biggest challenge has been providing a mix of developmental writing (review of capitalization, using suffixes for words, subject-verb agreement, etc.) and regular English 101 writing assignments. Many of our students come in and don't know the rules for writing a sentence with appropriate punctuation. (K. Welch, personal communication. November 15, 2012)

As a result, she and her colleagues are required to spend a good deal of course time reviewing basic writing skills before beginning the business of a first-year writing (FYW) class (K. Welch, personal communication. November 15, 2012).

Pertinent to OWI and learning through online settings, older adult students may face challenges in terms of their time available for class work. Even though traditional, residential students may work only part-time if at all, many commuter students—which includes some younger ones as well as most older students—are

far more likely to work full-time and have other external issues such as family and social activities that make significant claims on their time. These external influences often cause delays in completing assignments, both major (i.e., essay drafts and final papers) and minor (i.e., participation in online discussions). Indeed, online discussions—while asynchronous and often completed over the course of a week or more—require that students log into the system frequently to monitor the discussion and add their comments. Tardiness in posting assignments starts a chain of late activities that often lead to disaster in terms of the student's writing progress and eventual grades. In a writing course, where a series of planning exercises often occur before a draft is attempted, delays in turning in assignments build cumulatively to hinder the students' chances for success and, thus, they deplete the learners' motivation (Blair & Hoy, 2006). Such loss of motivation can lead to the dropping of classes, failure, and/or leaving school altogether.

However, countering all of these negative external factors is the fact that older students tend to adapt more readily to online courses than their younger classmates even though they may do less well than traditional students in face-to-face classes (Community College Research Center, 2013). They also are more likely to be highly motivated, in part because they understand the importance of what they are learning and are making deliberate choices to be in higher education classes. Anecdotal experience suggests that older adult students are ready to learn to write well because they see that life circumstances require that skill. They are especially motivated when the subject matter they are attempting to master will help them solve life problems. Adult learners tend to prefer a problem-solving approach to learning and learn best when materials are presented in a real-life context (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998) although they also may demonstrate some more adolescent-like needs. These needs would include seeking full independence in choosing research areas while expressing dependence on teachers for showing them step-by-step how to initiate such research, or claiming that the teacher's (sometimes negative) opinion of their writing is not meaningful while also desiring high grades that validate their efforts (Hewett, 2015a). In addition, older adult students tend to prefer learner-centered instruction (McDonald & Gibson, 1998). When the instructor tries teamwork or collaborative learning, these students may demonstrate discomfort. Nonetheless, OWI instructors often are emotionally committed to group work and experience difficulty taking into account these individual learning preferences (Western, 1999).

Providing Accessible OWI for Older Adult Students

Like working-class students who are new to the college environment, older adults also often come to higher education with a lack of knowledge on how

to take online classes. They sometimes are surprised at how fast things happen. As a result, they may choose several especially time-consuming courses for one semester or may schedule more classes overall than they can handle with their other life responsibilities (A. Cavanaugh, personal communication, December 7, 2012). One helpful policy to help such students online is to require students to contact the professor of an OWC before enrolling. Each time I receive a student request for information or permission to enroll, I send out a copy of a welcome memo that tells them about the course, the textbooks needed, and most important, the time requirements. I find that students may be shocked to learn that the college has an expectation of two minimum hours of outside work for every class hour they take. For OWI students, I make this clearer by converting that formula to the number of hours they are expected to put into the class each week and the ways they might be expected to use this time (e.g., discussion posts, content reading, research, draft writing, and the like). This information is especially helpful in short—in our case, five-week—summer sessions where students need to plan up to 30 hours' work per week for a three-semester credit hour writing course. While having this truth up front sometimes discourages enrollment, it is better for students to make an informed decision about how they will need to function in an OWC than to overcommit, become discouraged, and drop the course—or worse—end their college aspirations entirely because of a sense of inability or failure.

Ideas that professors are emotionally attached to often turn out to be less-than-ideal for student learning in OWI. With older adults, the most important of these may be collaborative work. While faculty have a litany of reasons why collaboration is problematic (e.g., good students carry the poor or dropouts leave groups shorthanded), writing professors still favor collaboration as a key means of teaching. The arguments for group work range from the idea that collaboration often is required at work to a desire to establish a sense of community in the class. There have also been studies that show positive learning results from the practice. Indeed, the online environment would seem to be created perfectly for such collaboration as peer group work and feedback, as well as for collaboratively written projects. But there also are studies that indicate collaboration may be a poor learning tool for older adult learners. One such study was done by Kristine Blair and Cheryl Hoy (2006). They found that adult learners bring a mass of experience, but with it comes a diversity of external influences (e.g., work, family, other courses) that make any kind of scheduled work times problematic. They argued that such exigencies create a need for teaching and learning in private, rather than community spaces (see also Hewett, 2015a). While Blair and Hoy (2006) claimed that adults learn better in more individualized spaces, they indicated that, at the very least, adult students thrive as well in private spac-

es as in public or community environments. Instead of requiring collaborative activities and group work, they recommended that teachers extend their more public concept of community to a one-to-one relationship (i.e., student-to-student and student-to-teacher) to better acknowledge the students' need for personal, private interaction. In fact, Blair and Hoy found that traditional email between the student and professor and among students themselves to be among the most powerful tools in learning.

One place where group work might prove to be useful for adult learners in OWI is in dealing with the negative life experiences they sometimes carry. Returning to Welch's (2013) description of older adult students as having had difficult life challenges in terms of disability, age, addictions, and even prior incarceration, she found that such issues can be addressed through the use of online discussion boards as a "vent" for frustrations as well as a means to practice writing and responding to others who write. Of course, it is crucial to model different ways for students to disclose their past challenges and to encourage them to think specifically about what they want to disclose in public online spaces and why. One reason that writing teachers may encourage thoughtful self-disclosure involves the powerful writing that can emerge when students take such work begun in the public online space and revise it into more formal writing assignments.

In addition to life experiences, the amount of time since their last writing course is often an issue for adult learners. This issue generally shows itself in sentence-level problems that normally are addressed in developmental English courses. Most courses at the FYW level and above are not geared to teach grammar and punctuation, which especially can be an issue when students opt to take a short online course in a summer or mini-session. To address this issue, Southern Christian University has changed their shorter five-week course to a ten-week course, enabling faculty to incorporate aspects of developmental English into the curriculum and to better accommodate the learning styles of adults (K. Welch, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Also these students may not acknowledge the types of multimodal writing assignments (see Chapter 15) taught in some OWCs as "writing" (see also Hewett, 2015a).

Finally, there is the issue of sensory decline. It is easy to make light of an issue like this, but it needs to be taken as seriously as any other learning challenge or physical disability. The difference with many disabilities is that such sensory decline happens, or will happen, to all of us. For example, before I can read a student draft, I need to use Microsoft Word's zoom feature to increase the viewing size to 150%. While I often can read the body text at the normal size, the labels on the axes of student graphs and the fine print on tables often make those parts of students' technical reports just a blur at the normal viewing level. When

developing courses, it is important to take eyesight and hearing difficulties into consideration. Konrad Morgan and Madeline Morgan (2007) recommended making provisions for adult students like using larger typefaces, easy-to-read fonts, and larger interaction spaces (e.g., comments boxes). Volume on audio files should be at the maximum level when recording or the student should be able to increase the volume as needed. The question becomes: When is sensory decline the responsibility of the instructor and when does it lie elsewhere? As Chapters 1 and 8 clearly indicate, the needs of students with disabilities regarding sight and sound should be addressed as part of the institution's responsibility to meet ADA guidelines. But when the circumstance is a decline, and not a full-fledged disability, the course designer/instructor can do much to alleviate students' problems and facilitate access because the disability laws in general expect all institutions of higher education to be ready to accommodate students with a variety of abilities and disabilities. Meeting these elderly students' needs will only move colleges closer to such readiness.

REMOTELY RURAL STUDENTS

If there is any student cohort that seems perfectly suited to online learning, it is the remotely rural. For students living far away from a college campus, the vast physical distance required for a commute is an obstacle in the best of weather. Add ice, snow, whiteout conditions, or heavy rain, and the trip can become impossible. In some parts of the United States, it can be well over 100 miles to the nearest college or university. Online learning appears to be the logical remedy for this situation; yet, in reality, remotely rural students may be just the group that is most disadvantaged when it comes to OWC access.

The study by *A Nation Online* (2004) considered the entire nation and found that, while dial-up still accounted for the majority of Internet connections, in urban areas the higher speed connections were beginning to take over. Not so in rural areas. Table 10.2 presents the contrast in Internet connections between rural and urban areas.

Table 10.2. Percent of households with Internet connection types

Connection Type	Rural	Urban
Broadband	24.7	40.4
Cable Modem	14.3	22.6
DSL	9.2	17.2
Dial-up	74.7	58.9

Source: A Nation Online (2004)

It is important to understand that the category is "rural," not "remotely rural" in this study. If the well-served rural areas were removed from this sample, we would see an even more uneven distribution of Internet access, which does not begin to account for types or age of computers or digital technology through which online students would access their OWCs.

In the same study, 22.1% of rural households that only had dial-up connections reported the lack of high-speed availability from their Internet providers as their reason for having the slower connectivity. Only 4.7% of urban households gave the same response (*A Nation Online*, 2004). Clearly, students living in these remote areas may find their connection options severely constrained. While being limited to dial-up alone is in itself a disadvantage for the user because of low download speeds, even dial-up connections are extremely limited in terms of availability in some rural areas. According to Thomas Davis and Mark Trebian (2001), in 2000, only 8.9% of Native American families on reservations had Internet access. The same year, the national average was 26.2%. Of 185 Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, only 76 had Internet connections. On the Navajo reservation co-located in Utah, Arizona and New Mexico, 80% of the homes—in 2001—still lacked even the most basic phone service (Davis & Trebian, 2001). In 2013, only 53% on the Navajo reservation had wireless broadband service available while the 2013 national average was 98% (Landry, 2013).

These patterns are not limited to Native American reservations but appear to be fairly universal across the rural parts of the United States. In south Texas, for example, colleges like Southwest Texas Junior College in Uvalde have serious limitations when designing online writing programs. With a 16,000 square mile service area, a large portion of the college's district is in areas where home Internet service simply is not available, yet students cannot get to the campus for onsite or hybrid classes given such a broad geographic service area. In many of these places, students are forced to go to local schools or public libraries to gain Internet access. In fact, in some places, even the schools and libraries do not have reliable service (J. Coe, personal communication, November 16, 2012).

While geographic remoteness certainly is one cause of this lack of Internet connectivity, Davis and Trebian (2001) identified additional factors that lead to a lack of access in rural areas, including the following:

- Weak economic base
- Lack of private investment
- Poor targeting of government policies for improving technology infrastructure
- Distrust of new technologies

The situation is so ubiquitous in remotely rural areas that, according to Hay-

thornthwaite (2007), across the country, usable telecommunications infrastructure privileges urban over all rural users. And most rural users are far better served than the remotely rural.

In addition to issues of accessibility, once remotely rural students enroll into an OWC, they also may face issues of "urban bias." This bias suggests that students from rural schools were not properly taught in high school; in other words, their teachers failed to "teach them right." Indeed, both students and their college teachers may believe that the students come to the college writing class already behind their classmates from urban and suburban areas (Donehower, Hogg, & Schell, 2007). Government policies, educational practices, and even the attitudes of professors and course designers reflect this bias. Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell (2007) noted the "rural illiteracy stereotype" as something perpetrated not just by the popular media but also especially by academics. Much like the working class student, rural students may feel marginalized and experience being the "other" in the class. Since a large portion of these students also comes from the working classes, the sense of being an outsider is even more acutely felt. These students often have internalized this stereotype.

Providing Accessible OWI for Remotely Rural Students

As indicated earlier, many of UMUC's students are located in areas where they cannot get to a college. To offer their courses as widely as possible, UMUC articulates programs with community colleges (M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Yet, even an operation of this magnitude cannot reach the truly remote student, who, without Internet connections, cannot access such a broadly reaching institution.

Students in many rural areas can only access OWCs if they can get to a school or library that offers Internet capabilities. When they do find one, there often are limitations in bandwidth and download speed as well as use time limitations, as noted previously. Many libraries also insist the sound be turned off on speakers, so unless the students own and bring their own headphones, they may not have access to sound files. To address this problem, some institutions offer a very "thin" architecture in their courses. For example, UMUC requires minimal downloading to be done by students because files stay on the LMS server. The college's library services also are available online (M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012), a practice supported by OWI Principle 13.

In my own OWCs, which enroll students from across the large state of Texas, I ask one of the college librarians to join the course with full instructor rights

in the LMS. Students are encouraged to mail or send discussion notes to her regarding the library research they are doing. In this way, students are enabled to stay within the LMS (also a thin architecture), giving students with limited bandwidth and access to time on the computer as close as possible to full access to the course as their classmates.

Therefore, as with working-class students, postsecondary institutions that cater to students in remotely rural locations have no control over student access and cannot necessarily help those with no Internet access to use their facilities. They should, however, take into consideration and make accommodations for those with reduced computer technology and Internet capabilities wherever possible. As with the working-class student with limited accessibility, software, and experience, access-focused recommendations for remotely rural students include avoiding situations where they need to download large files and audio/video files.

URBAN STUDENTS

As with OWI and multilingual students (see Chapter 9), research is sparse regarding OWI and urban populations, which includes Hispanic students and especially African-Americans. The same can be said regarding general studies about distance education and urban populations although urban households, according to Table 10.2, generally had greater access to most Internet connections types. Yet, even though the urban household tends to fare better than rural households, the numbers demonstrated a dearth of online technologies among the inhabitants of these regions. In addition to this limited access to the capability to participate in online education from one's urban household, serious exigencies that can affect these populations' lives can challenge urban students' access to online education.

As with other populations discussed in this chapter, urban students who want to participate in online education likely are affected by the digital divide; indeed, many may not have computer and Internet access in their household or even in a nearby location that will enable them to participate in online courses. An early focus group conducted by Kelly Ervin and Geoff Gilmore (1999) found that African-American college students had as much access to computer technologies as non-African Americans. However, these results contradicted the US Department of Commerce's (1999) study *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Culture*, which reported that the 23.2% of households with computers among African-Americans trailed all racial and ethnic populations in the United States (p. 18). The number of African-American households using the Internet that year was similarly meager (i.e., 11.2%, p. 26). The rosier picture presented

by the US Department of Commerce (2004) in *A Nation Online* showed that Internet access had significantly increased for African-Americans to 45.6%, and broadband use was at 14.2%. Both of these data points were higher than Hispanic populations, an ethnic group that also populates many urban areas. Despite the significantly greater Internet access experienced by African-Americans, they still trailed Caucasian and Asian-Americans by approximately 20% for Internet usage and approximately 10 to 20% for Broadband access. The significant gaps reported in these government reports about computer, Internet, and broadband use among the different racial and ethnic populations raises doubts about Ervin and Gilmore's (1999) findings.

But some researchers have questioned whether simply having access to a computer or various types of Internet access is really the primary access issue for various urban populations, especially African-Americans. Instead, they raised questions about what one might call cultural access, or a feeling that computer technologies were designed to accommodate the needs of primarily hegemonic populations. Blackmon (2003) described how African-American students in her class did not see themselves on the Internet; instead, they were "being asked to see themselves as either rappers and sports stars or as part of the raceless, white majority represented on the Web without ever having the ability to become one of the majority" (p. 93). Similarly, Barbara Monroe (2004) explained that those African-Americans who do not have Internet access are not all "have-nots"; some of these individuals are "don't-wants" who bristle at the marketing strategies technology companies use to target African-Americans. A study conducted by Okwumabua, Walker, Hu, and Watson (2011) regarding online learning and math showed that this cultural access understandably influences how African-American students perceive online education. Almost 65% of their student participants who were between the ages of 7 and 16 "indicated that they did not enjoy using computers to complete school work" (p. 246). While most of the students did not respond that the computer technology made them feel anxious, 67% reported that they did not feel comfortable with the technology (p. 246). Thus, more than a majority of the students had negative impressions about their ability to learn from online tutorials. Overall only 38% of the student respondents believed that online learning and tutoring had any value (p. 246).

Providing Accessible OWI for Urban Students

Many of the issues faced by urban students echo those faced by working class students (discussed above). As noted there, the issue of access to the Internet is beyond the control of the professor or even of the college or university. Any change in Internet accessibility will have to be initiated by the student's family or

the government; we must assume students who choose to take an online course are acknowledging that they can provide their own initial Internet connection.

A more addressable issue is what to do about students who have access but at a reduced level due to bandwidth limitations or inadequate software. Symptoms of this issue include slow downloads and the inability to open and manipulate files once downloaded. While urban areas generally have high-bandwidth availability, some families choose slower, less expensive options. Again, as is the case with working class students, teachers can alleviate some of this problem by careful consideration of required course materials. What do students really need to download, read, and use in the course? By making some simple changes and avoiding the use of more exotic bells and whistles such as audio files and Vokis, we can reduce these problems. Audios of lectures can be recorded on such slideware as PowerPoint, a software to which even low end users are likely to have access. Low bandwidth documents like PDF files also tend to be accessible to the users with limited software availability. In most LMSs, a PDF file will open in the LMS window, making it available without any additional software.

Then, there is the issue of limited experience. As noted above, African-American students often begin with far less experience than their classmates, and the types of experiences they may have (e.g., skills and drills exercises versus lengthy writing opportunities) do not prepare them for the kinds of writing and communicating that contemporary rhetoric and composition courses attempt to provide through OWI online (Kynard, 2007, MacGillis, 2004; McAdoo, 1994; Sheingold, Martin, & Endreweit, 1987).

The only cure for a lack of experience is more experience. Yet, while students flounder through technology issues, they are using valuable time and energy that could have been spent learning to write. The professor or course designer can simplify the technological challenges by keeping the number of presentation and participation modes to a minimum. The reductions made to alleviate software access problems (as indicated above), when coupled with using a limited number of options presentation and activity options available in the LMS, will allow the student to negotiate the class with a reduced amount of pressure from technology issues.

Finally, there is the problem of cultural access. It is here where the problems may be the most daunting. Blackmon (2003) pointed out that African-American students do not see themselves as a part of the world that is involved with the Internet. Monroe (2004) claimed that a substantial number of these students don't want to be involved in the online world. It is not easy to make a dramatic change in a student's view of the world and his place in it. There are some who may argue that it might be unethical to attempt to make such a change. Just as there are those who believe in students' right to their own language, there are

also those that believe the same right should extend to the students' worldview. Changes of this type must come from within the family, the community, or the student herself. While the professor can certainly help and encourage those wanting to become online savvy, Monroe's "don't want" students (2004) may be beyond our reach.

Based upon the limited research on urban populations, especially African-Americans, OWI administrators and instructors must understand that they need to help students navigate their way to the technologies that mediate the course. These technologies may not always be in the home; sometimes they are in labs and sometimes they are the mobile devices that these students carry (see Chapter 16). Likewise, WPAs and instructors must consider that not all populations value the technologies that mediate OWI equally, and they need to consider how a distrust of these technologies impacts students' learning. Certainly, the limited research available regarding this population indicates that more studies need to be conducted.

MILITARY LEARNERS

With the increased number of military personnel due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the availability of new GI bill funds, the numbers of active-duty military and veterans who also are college students have swelled. In the 2007-2008 academic year, 660,000 then-current and former members of the military accounted for 3% of all undergraduate college students in the United States. These students were divided evenly between two- and four-year colleges. Of those students, 215,000 were active-duty military personnel. In that time, 329,000, or 38% of these students, used veteran education benefits.

Veteran Students

With the passage of the Montgomery GI Bill, an education tuition program initiated in 2009, that number increased substantially. By January, 2013, more than one million attended American colleges and universities (APSCU, 2013). By then, most of the FYW classes for veterans were taken either online or from two-year colleges. D. Alexis Hart and Roger Thompson (2013) attributed this choice for online and two-year college courses to veterans' desire to quickly and inexpensively fulfill their general education requirements. Under the new GI bill, in 2009 veterans attending school full-time received $1,321 per month for 36 months (Radfors & Wun, 2009); in 2014, the benefit was $1,648 monthly (Military.com, 2014). By 2012, there were two million veterans eligible for $11 billion in federal benefits for education. After four years in existence, the GI

bill paid for 800,000 veterans' education (Fain, 2012). This explosion in enrollments has resulted in the founding of veterans' centers and organizations at colleges across the country.

Many students within the class of military veterans, like many nonmilitary adult learners, often bring desirable traits to their college courses. Common attributes include maturity, richness of experience, and an exposure to a well-defined organizational culture. Many also bring strong experience in leadership and possess sound decision-making abilities (Starr-Glasse, 2011). Perhaps most important for success, veterans also possess a high level of motivation. Not only have they come from a culture that values perseverance, tenacity, and positive outcomes, but the Department of Defense reimburses them only for courses that are completed successfully (Starr-Glasse, 2011). This requirement motivates veterans to stay with a course and to do well in it.

Like anyone else, however, veterans also may have traits that are less helpful in academic work. One commonly discussed issue is that military students often face a problem with the flexibility of college, especially the online class. They come from an environment that values, and teaches within, rigid structures. The element of self-pacing that may be comfortable for some other adults often is not appealing for them because it is counter to the culture in which they have operated for years in the military. In dealing with marines, Steven M. Jones, Wanda Mally, Larry A. Blevins, and James E. Munroe (2003) found that to be successful as students, military members must first overcome their resistance to change. A less-structured environment is one of the first changes they encounter. Others agree. Dave Jarrat of Inside Track, a company that works with colleges on student coaching services, indicated that students with military backgrounds sometimes struggle with the relatively flexible schedule of college (Fain, 2012). In a group discussion on a Sloan-C course, Phillip McNair (2013), the Vice-President for Strategic Initiatives at the American Public University System, pointed out that a structured environment is the norm for these students, right down to the position of their socks in a drawer, and they are comfortable with that. Very few OWCs have this kind of rigid structure despite there being a distinct beginning, middle, and end of the course and typically solid assignment due dates. Indeed, asynchronous OWI particularly asks students to develop their own work schedules to meet the course due dates for essays and class participation.

Another difficulty some military veterans (as well as other military students overall) face is a potential lack of acceptance by other students in classes. They may be targets of stereotyping, both political and cultural. In some college environments, military personnel are viewed as suspect and representative of a government whose actions many do not condone. For other classmates, the military is seen as a job of last resort for those unable to find employment in mainstream

America. In either case, military students may be marginalized and seen as distanced from contemporary society (Starr-Glasse, 2011). This distancing often makes their experience in a regular classroom—let alone an online class where students make more peripheral contact through how they describe themselves or appear in their posts—more difficult. Writing studies and OWI typically ask students to make connections through group discussions, peer workshops, and other community building activities. When an OWC begins with students introducing themselves via a photograph and biography, as Warnock (2009) recommended, veterans inadvertently may set themselves up for being marginalized by students with biases against the military.

Finally, there is what Hart and Thompson (2013) called the "deficit model." In this perspective, military veterans may be viewed from the standpoint of the deficits and disabilities they bring with them. These include possible Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In an association of Higher Education and Disabilities study, Mary Lee Vance and Wayne K. Miller (2009) found that these disorders affect 34% of the male and more than 10% of female veterans. Of all students—military and non-military—identified as having emotional disturbances twenty years ago, 63% attended community colleges (Directory of Disability, 1992), making working with disabled veterans potentially of greater concern at the two-year college level. In her CCCC's Chair's Address, Marilyn Valentino (2010) posed the question of whether faculty would be ready for the anticipated growing influx of such students. Long concerned with emotionally disturbed students, she provided strategies for dealing with these students when they indicate emotional difficulties in their writing (Valentino, 1996); OWI teachers most likely will see any indication of TBI, PTSD, or emotional disturbance in their writing. However, Hart & Thompson (2013) have argued that this "deficit" approach to military students can be harmful. It is important to note that since many veteran students have not served in combat, viewing military students from this perspective can inhibit student success.

Active-Duty Military

While veterans may be generally more able to matriculate on a brick-and-mortar campus, or onsite, for their courses, active-duty military personnel often do not have that luxury. Their deployments to remote settings make them like the remotely rural students who cannot access the campus itself. Active-duty military, therefore, often use online courses to continue their education—even from locations as far away as Afghanistan or Japan. Their college experiences are different in other ways as well. For the active-duty or reserve military student, scheduling is a huge issue. Temporary duty work or an unexpected deployment

decreases a student's chance for success in a course or, in the worst-case scenario, can end it—requiring a withdrawal or simply leading to the student no longer attending. While the military does encourage education, the culture of "the mission comes first" necessarily dominates (Starr-Glasse, 2011). In many cases, students cannot plan ahead for such occurrences, and they have no choice in needing to stop education temporarily to wait for a new beginning later.

Another issue is Internet accessibility. Active-duty military students often find their access to the Internet sporadic or even unavailable on deployment. When it is available, connection speed and bandwidth are variable and may be problematic. In 1997, fewer than 30% of enlisted men had access to Internet. The situation has improved tremendously since then; according to ArmyMomStrong.com (2014), deployed soldiers can access the Internet through local Internet cafes, the Morale-Welfare-Recreation Centers, and in their personal living quarters. Personal Internet access, however, can cost upwards of $100.00 per month—costly for low-ranking enlisted soldiers—but this expense can be reduced when shared among roommates. Yet, there still are issues of accessibility and bandwidth. Even simple asynchronous connections and synchronous presentations done in an LMS may be inaccessible depending on the day, time, and deployment. Restrictions on access may be for several days or longer. As more military students in remote locations matriculate to college, this problem of having sufficiently reliable and consistent connectivity to complete an online course is likely to get worse rather than better (Starr-Glasse, 2011).

One Navy veteran (who asked to remain anonymous) expressed that he took a technical writing class online while he was on active duty. He ran into serious problems when he was deployed. He had no Internet access on the ship and was unable to complete the course work. He could not receive an "incomplete" grade because he had not yet completed the required percentage of the course work to qualify for it. His only choices were to withdraw or take a grade of F. He could not get a refund on his tuition and fees because his situation occurred past the deadline. He could not get a reimbursement from GI Bill funds because he had not completed the course (Personal communication, November 26, 2012). Such a situation in an OWI setting can leave the instructor frustrated and the student more so.

Even when deployment is not an issue and students are able to finish a course unimpeded, there is yet another obstacle to be faced. The continuous and sometimes rapid rotation of military personnel makes staying in one duty station for four or more years highly unlikely. In peace time, rotations typically happen on three-year cycles with occasional two- or four-year duties. During wartime, deployments and rotation cycles can be much shorter, causing more disruption in one's school opportunities. Moving and being deployed to war zones can prevent military students from being able to complete a degree program at a single school

unless all of the courses are available for online study. Because courses, especially at the upper class level, do not always transfer, military students often find they need to take more courses than their classmates (thus, costing them more money) in order to achieve a degree—if they can finish at all (The Sloan Consortium).

There are other issues faced by military personnel that seldom are considered by colleges. One of those regards textbooks. With class members spread around the world in many cases, the time required to mail textbooks to students can be prohibitive. Printed textbooks must be mailed, and that means student registration must close weeks before classes begin. Even under normal circumstances, receiving a book through the mail could take a week or more, but it often can take considerably more time than that because of the remote location and sporadic mail service to some deployment sites. The use of ebooks might seem to be a reasonable solution. In practice, however, ebooks also can prove to be an unworkable and unreliable option given that deployed military often do not have consistent Internet access and when they do, the bandwidth availability often is poor, making downloading slow and cumbersome. At UMUC, for example, although neither method is completely satisfactory, *both* print and ebooks have been used with many online courses to at least provide more flexibility (M. Parker, personal communication, December 7, 2012). Some publishers are beginning to provide the electronic text of academic titles if the student pays the full cost of the print textbook. These electronic files can be read on various portable ebook readers.

Another issue that colleges face with military students is the handling of learning or physical disabilities. In the military, disability percentages are linked to the individual's ability to participate in a job. In colleges, the process is more complicated. First, the student must self-identify to an office that handles such issues. A costly series of tests and a process of diagnosis sometimes follow that identification. In a culture of self-sufficiency and personal strength, the active-duty military student may see this process as declaring a shortcoming and may consider asking for help as presenting a negative image of himself or getting an advantage other students do not have. As a result, there may be a tendency to resist taking that step, thus leaving the military student without the assistance that a non-military student in the same position would enjoy (A. Butler, personal communication, December 7, 2012).

Providing Accessible OWI for Military Learners

Hart and Thompson (2013) argued that many of the transition issues faced by veterans are the same faced by other older adult students when moving from earlier careers back to college. As such, many of the recommendations presented in that section apply here as well. Others argue, however, that issues unique to

veterans are more critical and need special attention.

David Starr-Glasse (2011) identified several traits of the military student that are important to consider when developing an OWC that will be effective for the students' learning styles. First, military students tend to be self-directed. While some students wait to be told what the next move is and when to make it, members of the military have been trained to read available guidance and work with it autonomously, and they may prefer to be treated as autonomous learners. But, in an apparent contradiction that matches adult students who exhibit adolescent traits (Hewett, 2015a), military learners also are used to an environment that is extremely structured (Jones, Mally, Blevins, & Munroe, 2003; McNair, 2013). This dissonance shows up repeatedly in the research literature, and it reveals why military learners may become fixated on the requirements of a syllabus or a particular writing assignment while, perhaps, wanting to accomplish the assignment in their own timeframes. In addition to this learning tendency, military students' issues of deployment require flexibility in assignments, participation requirements, and schedules (Starr-Glasse, 2011) just where they also might crave fixed structure.

In answer to this dilemma, McNair (2013) noted that while a firmly structured course is preferable, there are times when flexibility is important (e.g., times of increased workload or deployment). When it comes to the work requirements and deadlines, the professor's flexibility should not take away from OWC's structure in general. The student's prior experience can be used effectively here. While military life is normally very structured, sudden changes in duty and location have prepared them to some degree, for these abrupt, last-minute changes. Sharing this analogy in an online discussion post or an announcement can help military students make the necessary adjustments more easily.

As noted previously, military students often see themselves as outsiders in the college writing classroom. Attitudes of other students toward members of the military may reinforce that feeling. Indeed, they need to be encouraged to see themselves as legitimate participants in the class community (Starr-Glasse, 2011), and one way to accomplish this is to connect the kinds of work that military learners do with the writing of the class. Discussion threads or early writing assignments that enable such personal revelation may be useful for encouraging the OWC's students to view each other more equitably and from a mutual position of respect. However, because military learners are comfortable with collaborative efforts from their occupational experiences, community-building activities in online courses, when they do not require group projects with group grades, are not only comfortable for military learners but may increase student motivation and reduce attrition (Sadera, Robertson, Song, & Midon, 2009). That said, the fact that they sometimes are forced to disappear from the class at a

moment's notice—temporarily or even permanently—and without the ability to explain their absence to classmates, collaborative work can become impractical and military students may once again experience themselves as different. It is a serious "Catch-22" that the OWI teacher must consider when military learners are part of the course. The military is not a "regular" job, yet these learners want a regular education.

Finally, there is the issue of what to do when an otherwise successful student is forced to leave class for a time or permanently due to duty requirements or deployment. Clearly this is an opportunity for flexibility in rules. At UMUC, deployments in mid-semester are handled in one of two ways. If student can return to class by end of the semester, he can complete the course through one-on-one work with the professor. If not, then the student is granted an "administrative withdrawal" for a grade. At many colleges, the grade of incomplete is another option available when the student cannot get back to class before the end of the term. However, rules governing incomplete grades often require the student to have finished a certain percentage of the coursework before becoming eligible for an incomplete, which may not be within the military student's control. At Lee College, the requirement for an incomplete is 70% of the coursework. Colleges that are enrolling active duty members should re-examine such rules to build in flexibility that accommodates the students' needs.

It would appear that online teaching gives the portability and flexibility that military learners so desperately need. An OWC is an ideal venue for these students in many cases. In online programs, students often can finish their degrees at the school they started even if they are re-assigned elsewhere (The Sloan Consortium). With a few minor adjustments, OWI teachers and their institutions can provide a workable way for these learners to earn degrees while still engaged in active duty.

INCARCERATED STUDENTS

If there ever seemed to be a match made in heaven, it is online learning and students in prisons. Somewhat more than two million people currently are incarcerated in prisons and local jails and detention centers (Maeroff, 2003; Wing, 2013). The United States tops all other countries for incarcerated citizens (Wing, 2013). For decades, colleges have sent faculty to prisons around the country to conduct classes within the prison walls. Lee College began sending faculty to teach individual courses at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Huntsville Center in 1966. Technical course faculty began to be assigned to the prison the next year, but it was not until 1978 that full-time academic faculty members were located onsite. Throughout those years, academic faculty mem-

bers made the 190-mile round trip to the center twice a week to teach classes face-to-face. In 1984, the program became a regular branch campus with a full college faculty and administration onsite, complete with labs, greenhouses, and other educational facilities (Lee College).

Prison programs like these are extremely costly, and the students' choice of subjects to study is limited by the number of faculty assigned to the site. Currently, the state of Texas spends about $128 million each year on education programs for inmates. State Senator Florence Shapiro, chair of the Senate Education Committee, has argued that online programs could save the state a substantial amount of money. However, Michelle Lyons with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice indicated that such online courses are not a viable option because most inmates are not allowed to go online for various reasons. In Texas, no inmate has open Internet access although some are allowed to logon in classrooms and certain vocational programs ("Plano Senator," 2011).

Research has revealed that nothing reduces recidivism more than education. Even a simple GED program reduces recidivism by 29% (Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001). Most prison units have such programs. But a study done in New York showed that inmates who complete a college degree while incarcerated are *four* times less likely to reoffend (*Postsecondary*, 2003). Inmates who completed two years of college in the Lee College program at the Huntsville prisons have a 10% recidivism rate compared to 60% for those receiving no additional education. But college offerings are costly and far less common in America's prisons than GED programs. What better way to address this population than through online classes? Students would have a virtually unlimited choice of universities, programs, and classes to choose from. Colleges would be saved the cost of sending faculty or building branch campuses at prison facilities. And what about the thousands of prisoners housed in units that do not currently have college programs to offer? They, too, would have the option of improving their education and earning a degree.

Yet, online programs have been resisted by state prison systems across the country because authorities fear inmates will have Internet contact with persons and groups on the outside that could lead to negative effects on the prisoner's rehabilitation or to criminal activity. Nonetheless, 46 state prison systems (all except Hawaii, Nebraska, Iowa, and Nevada) allow Internet use in supervised educational settings ("Computer Use," 2009). Typical of the policies in most states is this one from Ohio:

> No prisoner in a private correctional facility, county correctional facility, municipal correctional facility, or correctional institution under the control of the department of rehabilita-

> tion and correction shall access the Internet through the use of a computer, computer network, computer system, computer services, or information service, unless the prisoner is under direct supervision and is participating in an approved educational program that requires the use of the Internet for training or research purposes, and in accordance with this rule. ("Internet Access for Prisoners," 2005)

Nonetheless, while the exception for "approved educational programs" sounds promising, the problem here is the phrase "under direct supervision." This need for supervision means that, in order for a prisoner to be able to access the Internet, there must be someone in the room watching at all times. While the motivation behind such a rule is understandable, it also defeats the purpose of online education as students can only work when there is a teacher or a guard overseeing their actions. Colleges again are faced with having to place faculty or staff onsite. Granted, the college employee does not have to be a qualified professor, but there still will be requirements for personnel and restrictions on times of availability that local prison officials prefer not to deal with. At Lee College's Huntsville prison campus, for instance, the warden chooses to follow the policy by not allowing Internet use at all. This is a commonly applied solution to the problem, and it denies access to an educational institution's Internet-based LMS as well as to online research options. While there are other options, some of which will be discussed shortly, prison officials who are skeptical of security issues in any new plans will have to be persuaded of the invulnerability of any option under consideration.

Providing Access to OWI for Incarcerated Students

In one sense, the problems facing students in prisons are the easiest to solve. The catch is that while the solutions are simple in themselves, prison administrations must be convinced of their workability, and that is not always possible.

One easy method for allowing online teaching in prisons is for colleges and universities to forget about the traditional Internet offerings and rely instead on a closed-circuit intranet like those common in business and industry. In this way, students would have access to nothing except materials housed on the college LMS server. There need be no connections to the Internet whatsoever. From the standpoint of the student, the course would appear and operate the same as one conducted via the Internet. For the professor and course designer, there is one difference. All files students access in the course of the semester must be housed on the intranet LMS server, which requires significant planning to enable abundant content and research materials—especially for OWCs that require students

to learn researched writing strategies. To meet the prison guidelines, there can be no external links to Internet sites and no other physical connection to the Internet.

On the surface, an intranet connection would seem to be a reasonable solution and easy to sell, but prison administrators will need to be convinced (guaranteed, if you will) that it is impossible for prisoners to contact anyone or reach any site except those specifically used in the course and housed on that closed server. Once programs like these are established and tested in a few places, their acceptance is likely to become more universal very quickly. In the meantime, most prisoners in the United States are unlikely to have access to OWI in a hybrid or fully online setting.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This discussion began with the overarching OWI Principle 1 regarding the need for OWI to be inclusive and accessible. It is clear that, at least in the nontraditional student cohorts discussed in this chapter, higher education institutions have not reached that goal. Yet, the CCCC OWI Committee acknowledged inclusivity and access as "the key concern" for faculty as colleges move ahead with OWI (p. 7). There is no question that many of the obstacles faced by nontraditional students negotiating OWCs are formidable. Some, like Internet access for the poor or remotely rural, probably are beyond the scope of colleges and universities given the technology available. Those are issues that will have to be resolved by such others as government, individual communities, businesses, and the individual students themselves. But many of the other obstacles can be addressed and most in a relatively simple way. For example:

- Faculty should become aware of the difficulties nontraditional students face when enrolling in OWCs. Internet-access difficulties may be the most prevalent problem, but underserved students may also be using outdated computer technology and may be less familiar with educational and social uses of digital technology.
- As the population ages, WPAs and OWI teachers need to understand how diminishing sensory or cognitive faculties may be reflected in students' abilities to access OWCs or to respond to writing assignments online.
- WPAs should consider how to provide content through the LMS, textbooks, and ebooks such that remote OWI students have access to the same degree as onsite or geographically local students.
- Policies should be developed that take into consideration the special time-related needs of individuals in particular types of careers, such as

the military or other work places where travel and temporary duty is common.
- In the case of prisons, WPAs and OWI teachers should develop intranet-based materials and approaches to OWCs that can reach incarcerated students while still meeting security requirements.

Let me be clear here. I am not suggesting that these underserved nontraditional student populations will have an equal playing field compared to traditional students with years of high tech experience and a relatively uncluttered (or, differently cluttered) private life—students for whom college is their number one or even only career. Nonetheless, online courses and OWI specifically can be made more accessible to the nontraditional students discussed in this chapter, giving them a chance to be successful and to accomplish their learning goals.

NOTES

1. Some research has suggested that when it comes to computer use, working-class students' elementary and secondary school experiences are different from that of the managerial/professional classes (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Bernstein, 1971; Gos, 1995, 1996). One of those differences is in the application of computers in learning. Olsen (1997) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) pointed out long ago that students from different social classes are rewarded for behaviors appropriate for the occupations they are expected to one day fill. Others have argued that working-class students are denied exposure to knowledge and skills—including computer skills—that would allow them to make a successful border crossing (e.g., Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979; Bernstein, 1971; Kynard 2007; MacGillis, 2004). Indeed, research suggests that the use of computers varies significantly according to class. Schools with higher budgets or that serve primarily middle and upper class populations tend to use computers for collaborative projects and communications as preparation for the professional and managerial roles their students are expected to play as adults. These communication activities require Internet access and extensive writing. Intercity and predominantly working class schools, on the other hand, use computers for drilling lessons, which might have been considered a reasonable preparation for taking orders in the lowest rungs of the service industry (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Cuban, 2001; Monroe, 2004; Moran & Selfe, 1999). As a result, the students in lower budget schools may emerge as only low-end users of computers with little or no experience in writing in the digital environment.

2. Several personal communications are cited in this chapter. A group telephone interview was done with Andrew Cavanaugh, Mark Parker, and Allison Butler from the University of Maryland University College. All conversations with Kristen Welch occurred via emails. The interview with Jill Coe was in-person.

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